DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 017 CG 026 995

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TITLE Psychological Services in the Schools. Digest.
INSTITUTION American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Greensboro, NC.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 95
CONTRACT RR93002004
NOTE 4p.; Published as a part of a collection of eight digests prepared collaboratively by APA and ERIC/CASS, see CG 026 993.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Psychology; Consultants; Counselor Training; *Delivery Systems; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Psychological Evaluation; Psychology; Psychometrics; School Counseling; *School Psychologists

ABSTRACT

Psychological services have been part of the American schooling experiences for nearly a century. The nature of school psychology services, however, has changed dramatically over the decades so that modern school psychology services differ significantly from their roots. For much of this century school psychology services have emphasized assessment practice, but over the past two decades school psychology services have expanded to meet a broader array of needs. The entry level requirements for school psychology practitioners continue to increase as the profession aspires to higher levels of expertise. Modern psychological services may be organized in the schools in a variety of ways. However, regardless of organizational structure, a similar core of health services are offered: (1) assessment of student's needs and characteristics related to performance in school; (2) direct and indirect interventions that improve the adaptation of a child, group of children, parents, teachers, or other individuals or groups; (3) program development and evaluation; and (4) supervision and coordination of school psychology or related services. School psychologists with post-doctoral training often provide an expanded array of services to school children. Psychological services in the schools continue to adapt to the needs of society by expanding to meet theses needs with newly developed services. (JBJ)

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ED 390 017

Psychological Services in the Schools

by R.W. Kamphaus, Ph.D.

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Psychological Services in the Schools

R.W. Kamphaus, Ph.D.

Overview

Psychological services have been part of the American schooling experience for nearly a century. In fact, the Child Study Bureau of the Chicago Public Schools (the first recognized school psychology service) traces its roots to 1898 (French, 1990). The nature of school psychology services, however, has changed dramatically over the decades so that modern school psychology services differ significantly from their roots (Bardon, 1990).

For much of this century school psychology services have emphasized assessment practice. School psychologists have primarily been involved in evaluating the needs of children in order to determine eligibility for special education and related services (Bardon, 1990). Although, school psychology services have always been diverse, the array of practice has not been as visible as the central assessment role. For example, even when carrying out primarily assessment duties school psychologists have been involved in delivery of interventions, research planning and consultation, and administration.

Over the course of the past couple of decades school psychology services have expanded to meet a broader array of needs. In some cases, indirect service delivery has become the norm and school psychology services have increasingly influenced the entire student body, not just children who are identified as having special needs (Bardon, 1990). School psychology services will continue to evolve to include a changing array of services that will likely be characterized by increasing diversity (Bardon, 1990).

Service Providers

The entry level requirements for school psychology practitioners continue to increase as the profession continually aspires to higher levels of expertise. In addition, large numbers of providers possess a doctoral degree and, increasingly, school psychologists are seeking formal post-doctoral training experiences.

School psychology services are typically delivered by individuals with graduate-level training in psychology and education. Some service providers possess a master's or educational specialist degree and are credentialed by a state board of education or other sanctioning body. Other service providers include psychologists holding the doctoral degree who are licensed for the independent practice of psychology andwho hold specialty expertise in school psychology. In some cases psychological services in the schools may be delivered by psychologists with various types of specialty training such as counseling psychology or developmental psychology.

Organizational Structure of Services

Modern psychological services may be organized in the schools in a variety of ways. In some schools, psychologists form a unit within a pupil personnel team that is chaired by a psychologist. In this organizational structure, school psychology services reflect their historical association with the child study bureau found in urban schools in the early part of this century. In other school districts, psychologists are stationed at individual schools and they may be only loosely affiliated with other psychologists serving the same school district.

Health care and education reform portend great changes for the organization of school psychology services. School psychologists may now be found to be part of school-based health clinics and community mental health centers. In some cases school psychological services are provided by psychologists who are employed in independent health care provider groups.

Regardless of organizational structure, school psychologists offer a similar core of health care services and, where a psychologist holds a special expertise, an expanded array of services.

Core Services

Some of the core psychological services, which are offered by psychologists in the schools, include the following (APA, 1981):

1. Assessment of a student's needs and characteristics that are related to a child's performance in school. Typically, assessment services are broadly defined to include other factors that may affect a child's progress, such as parent and teacher variables, and macrovariables such as school climate and policies.

2. Direct and indirect interventions that improve the adaptation of a child, group of children, parents, teachers, or other individuals or groups. Direct interventions may involve services such as individual or group counseling or the delivery of parent or teacher education programs. Examples of indirect services include consultations with teachers, parents, or principals to effect change that, in turn, may influence a child's or group of children's educational or behavioral outcomes.
3. Program development and evaluation. School psychologists are frequently sought out to join school- or community-based groups that are designing intervention programs for large numbers of individuals. School psychologists bring psychological knowledge, measurement expertise, and other skills to such endeavors.
4. Supervision and coordination of school psychology or related services. School psychology is often called on to fill administrative or quasi-administrative roles in schools and other settings. School psychologists may be found in the ranks of directors of health-care clinics, special education, and health-related services among other administrative roles.

Specialized and Emerging Services

School psychologists with post-doctoral training or other experiences often provide an expanded array of services to school children. Some psychologists work in school district research centers conducting research on learning, assessment, or program effectiveness. Others possess expertise in pediatrics, allowing them to consult with teachers regarding the adaptation of a child with Sickle Cell Disease or Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia to schooling. Still others possess special expertise in family therapy, neuropsychology, statistics and measurement, infant and preschool development, behavioral medicine or other areas.

School psychology services are also expanding rapidly to meet societal needs. Examples of the types of needs being met through expanded services include the habilitating of learning disabled adults to college, cognitive therapy for brain-injured adults and geriatric populations, and the design of computer-based training and assessment paradigms for individuals of all ages.

Summary

Psychological services in the schools continue to adapt to the needs of society by expanding to meet these needs with newly developed services. As schools strive to meet the needs of children and as society addresses the educational and related needs of all individuals, the demand for an expanded array of services will continue. Moreover, the clientele served by school psychology methods continues to expand to include all children in schools, groups of individuals, organizations, and adults.

The science of human behavior, that is psychology, has a wide range of application. Given the crucial nature of schooling it is no wonder that psychology has proven to be an important liaison between schooling and children; the applied arm of the discipline will again be called upon to apply this expertise for the benefit of future generations. Given the ebb and flow of scientific discovery it is impossible to specify the future of service delivery. If past experience is predictive of the future, then it is likely that the core [school psychology] services will remain but they will be overshadowed by newer methods and procedures that are delivered via new organizational systems.

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